

Last Del. 1 link set to open May 19

Entire route should be complete
by Memorial Day, DelDOT says

By CHIP GUY

Sussex Bureau reporter

The last piece of Delaware's costliest road project will be opened to traffic just in time for Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial kickoff to the summer season.

The state Department of Transportation plans to open the last 8-mile stretch of Del. 1 on May 19, just four days before thousands of motorists are expected to descend on the state headed for the coastal resorts.

The section of the limited-access highway from north of Smyrna to near Odessa will be connected to the two other pieces of Del. 1 that were finished over the past 10 years.

Once connected, they will complete a nearly 40-mile-long, \$1 billion limited-access toll highway from near the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal south to Dover Air Force Base. Del. 1 continues north as a limited-access highway from the canal to I-95, but that section is not a toll road.

People who live and work in the area where highway construction has been a part of their lives for the last few years are pleased the work will soon be done.

Larry Gardner lives at the corner of Black Diamond Road and U.S. 13 near the last section of roadway, which has been under construction since 2000. He hopes the new highway

will eliminate the summertime clogs that have plagued U.S. 13 for decades.

"It's going to be good for the people who want to get to the beach," Gardner said. "Let 'em fly."

State highway officials began planning for this nearly 20 years ago, in hopes of creating a fast, uninterrupted route for motorists traveling through Delaware and to beach communities.

Much of the heavy construction work is finished, but crews will be working hurriedly in the coming weeks to make the mid-May

deadline.

Less than 20 percent of the project remains unfinished, and that work mostly involves the installation of guardrails, painting road stripes, erecting signs and paving shoulders, said DelDOT spokesman Mike Williams.

Barring some unforeseen problem or overly wet, cold weather, the new section will be opened May 19. Williams cautioned, however, that the official opening date could be moved.

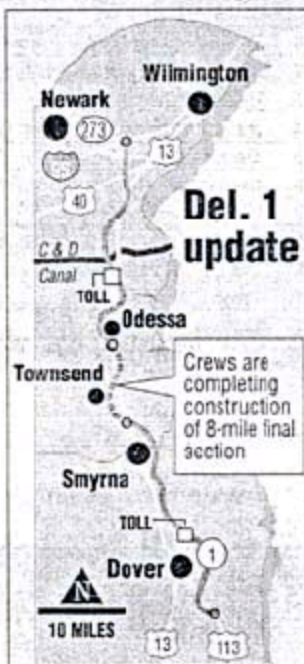
"We always have to have a little bit of flexibility," Williams said. "But our

goal has always been to be operating ... before the Memorial Day weekend."

The most complicated work left to be done — connecting the new portion of road to the Dover-Smyrna portion on the south and the Odessa segment on the north — will be performed in the days leading up to the opening.

That will result in about three days of lane closures on U.S. 13 and Del. 1. Specifics on the traffic-flow plans will be released in coming months.

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